



CHRONIC FATIGUE SYNDROME

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

- Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) is a debilitating, long-lasting disorder that affects approximately 500,000 Americans.
- CFS appears to primarily affect white women, but information about the occurrence of CFS in children and adolescents and in racial/ethnic minorities is limited.
- Despite more than a decade of research, the cause of CFS remains unknown and no diagnostic tests have been developed.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

The objectives of CDC's [CFS program](#) are to: (1) estimate the magnitude of the problem in the United States; (2) define the natural history of CFS; (3) identify causative agents, risk factors, and diagnostic markers, and (4) develop educational programs for healthcare providers. CDC activities include: (1) tracking and monitoring CFS in defined populations; (2) an international effort to revise the CFS case definition; and (3) laboratory studies. CDC also funds research to study neuroendocrine mechanisms of CFS and to search for novel infectious agents as causes of CFS.

Example of program in action: Since 1997, CDC has extensively studied CFS in Wichita, Kansas. Data generated from this study have provided the first rigorous estimates of the occurrence of CFS in the general population (217 cases per 100,000 persons), facilitated the development of data-driven case definitions, and demonstrated the complexity of the clinical course of CFS. Laboratory studies from this population could ultimately provide diagnostic markers for CFS.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC will continue to lead efforts to derive and evaluate an empiric case definition for CFS. CDC will also analyze data from a series of studies to: (1) identify associations between CFS and novel or uncharacterized infectious agents and (2) further develop detailed clinical studies to evaluate neuroendocrine and immunologic parameters of CFS. In 2002, CDC will continue studies of CFS following acute infections and exposure to immunologic stimuli and will consider beginning a prospective study of CFS in children. Finally, CDC will continue collaborations with the Health Resources and Services Administration and patient advocacy groups to develop educational materials on CFS for primary healthcare providers.

For more information on this and other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/programs.

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